

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, COBBS CREEK BRANCH
(Free Library of Philadelphia, Blanche A. Nixon Branch)
5800 Cobbs Creek Parkway
Philadelphia
Philadelphia
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6751
PA-6751

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, COBBS CREEK BRANCH (Free Library of Philadelphia, Blanche A. Nixon Branch)

HABS NO. PA-6751

- Location: 5800 Cobbs Creek Parkway, between Baltimore Avenue, 58th Street, and 59th Street, (West) Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania. The library faces southeast and is situated within a small park.
- Owner: The library is part of the Free Library of Philadelphia system and is owned by the City of Philadelphia.
- Present Use: Branch Library
- Significance: Completed in 1925, the Cobbs Creek Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia was the next to last of twenty-five branch libraries built through an endowment from industrialist-turned-philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. The impact of Carnegie's grant program on the development of public libraries cannot be overstated. He came of age in an era when libraries were rare, privately funded institutions and access was through subscription. Believing in the power of libraries to create an egalitarian society that favored hard work over social privilege by allowing equal access to knowledge, between 1886 and 1917 Carnegie provided forty million dollars for the construction of 1,679 libraries throughout the nation. The vast resources that he allotted to library research and construction contributed significantly to the development of the American Library as a building type. In addition, by insisting that municipalities supply a building site, books, and annual maintenance funds before bestowing grants Carnegie elevated libraries from the arena of private philanthropy to that of civic responsibility.
- Philadelphia was the recipient of one of the largest Carnegie grants for library construction. Although the city was among the first to establish a free library system, it had no purpose-built structures prior to the Carnegie endowment. The branch libraries were built between 1905 and 1930, under the direction of the city appointed Carnegie Fund Committee, and designed by a "who's-who" of Philadelphia's architects. The twenty extant branch libraries remain as a remarkable intact and cohesive grouping, rivaled only by that of New York City, with fifty-seven.¹ The Cobbs Creek Branch was designed by Edmund B. Gilchrist who was known for his English-style "Cotswold farmhouse" designs. It

¹ Carnegie provided funding beginning in 1903 for thirty branch libraries, but with rising construction costs, only twenty-five could be built, the last few of which were subsidized by the city. Of Philadelphia's twenty-five libraries, four are no longer extant and a fifth (Frankford) has been altered beyond recognition. Four others are no longer used as library buildings. In New York, fifty-seven were still standing in 1996. The next single largest grants for branch libraries were given to Cleveland (15), Baltimore (14), and Cincinnati (10).

is typical of Philadelphia's Carnegie libraries in its T-shaped plan and symmetrical fenestration, but completely atypical in its building materials and architectural styling; rather than the almost formulaic, understated Beaux Arts style and brick construction that came to define Carnegie Libraries nationwide, Cobbs Creek combines elements of stripped-down classicism with streamlined Moderne, and is built of steel and cinder blocks with a façade of stucco cement and terra cotta. Cobbs Creek is also unusual in that over half of the construction cost was paid for by funds issued through a city ordinance or collected by local citizens and businessmen, a situation necessitated by the unanticipated decrease in the Carnegie grant funds towards the end of the building campaign, caused by inflation.

Historian: Catherine C. Lavoie

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: By June 1924 the architect's plans, dated 1 April 1924, were approved and a list of qualified contractors for solicitation of bids had been compiled by John T. Windrim of the Library Board. In early August the construction contract was awarded to William R. Dougherty and a meeting was scheduled for 12 August to discuss the details.² No other information is available in the minutes of the Carnegie Fund Committee regarding the construction process. The official opening was held 30 December 1925.³

2. Architect: The architect for the Cobbs Creek Branch was Edmund Beaman Gilchrist (1885-1953). According to the minutes, Gilchrist was selected at the recommendation of architect John T. Windrim, who had himself designed three branch libraries and was newly elected to serve on the Board of Trustees for the Free Library. The minutes record the contents of a letter send by Gilchrist outlining his experience to date:

Following my conversation with you with reference to the experience I have had on buildings of the larger and more public nature it has occurred to me that my work, during the war, for the Bureau of Yards and Dock in Washington, and for the Shipping Board, might have some bearing on the question. In the Bureau of Yards and Docks I had the responsibility of a large Naval Aviation Base in San Diego. This group of buildings, which is of a very permanent nature, and with a wide and varied range of uses, offered opportunities and experiences which I shall always feel most fortunate to have had. In the Shipping Board my work was chiefly Town Planning. Although the measure of opportunity and accomplishment in the work was not of the specific character to have much bearing on the matter in question, it gave me a feeling of confidence in the larger projects that I have since had to do. Thank you extremely for the interest and kindness you are giving to this matter, I am, Sincerely Yours, Edmund B. Gilchrist.⁴

² Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, 11 July & 9 August, 1924.

³ "New Library Branch Opens," *Public Ledger*, 31 December 1925.

⁴ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, 6 March 1923; the letter was addressed 28 February.

A motion was made and, based on the information provided and the recommendation of John T. Windrim, the committee agreed to the appointment of Gilchrist as architect.

Edmund Gilchrist was a native of the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia, where he attended the Germantown Friends School. Afterwards, he attended Drexel Institute for a year and then spent two years at the University of Pennsylvania. Following his formal education, Gilchrist apprenticed with two very accomplished local architects, first with Wilson Eyre, Jr., and then with Horace Trumbauer. Both of these architects also designed Philadelphia libraries prior to Gilchrist's own appointment; Eyre designed the McPherson Square Branch, and Trumbauer, the Central Library (still under construction at the time of Gilchrist's appointment). Gilchrist spent five years with Wilson Eyre who was recognized as a master in the design of English-inspired residential buildings. Most of Gilchrist's designs followed in the same vein, although his work for the government, as mentioned in his letter, is a notable exception.

The planning that Gilchrist undertook for the government would serve him well in other respects; he was included on the American Institute of Architect's (AIA) Community Planning Committee concurrent with the design and construction of the Cobbs Creek Branch, from 1923-1926. Gilchrist also served on the AIA's Special Committee on the Economics of Site Planning and Housing in 1934-1935, and on a committee for President Herbert Hoover's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership in 1932.⁵ The latter likely led to Gilchrist's involvement in the 1933 design and construction of the Pennypack Creek Homes, a federal housing project sponsored by President Roosevelt's newly formed Housing Division of the Public Works Administration. New Deal era projects such as this were important in setting the tone for housing innovations, particularly in the design of modern architectural forms, public housing, and planned communities. This foray into low-cost modern housing likely provided the inspiration for the more streamlined design of the Cobbs Creek Branch.

3. Owners: The library is part of the Free Library of Philadelphia system and is owned by the City of Philadelphia. The lot was provided by the city at the urging of the City Council for the 4th District in an effort led by Councilman George Connell. On 28 December 1923 the mayor signed an ordinance transferring a portion of a plot at Fifty-ninth Street, Baltimore Avenue, and Cobbs Creek Parkway from the custody of the Department of Public Works Bureau of City Property to the Board of Trustees of the Free Library.⁶

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The contractor was William R. Dougherty of Philadelphia, whose low bid came in at \$50,356, a reduction of the original bid of \$57,700 that resulted from proposed changes in design and materials.

⁵ Roger Moss and Sandra Tatman, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects* (Boston: G.K. Hall & company, 1985), 304-305.

⁶ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, 4 January 1924.

5. Original plans and construction: Gilchrist's original drawings, dated 1 April 1924, are located at the University of Pennsylvania's Architectural Archives, as is the *General Conditions of the Contract*, which provides information relating to changes to the design as it was originally planned. Although the basic plan remained the same, a fair amount of detailing was omitted. The original drawings and specifications called for a higher parapet wall, poured concrete facing and projecting stonework, and an ornamental grille as part of a more elaborate surround for the front entry. According to the *Conditions*, the walls were to be constructed with a steel substructure with patented Cinder Concrete Blocks, manufactured by the Penn Building Company of Philadelphia, and reinforced concreted was to form the lintels and other openings. Indiana limestone was planned for the parapet coping, cornice, inscriptive tablets over the entry, pilasters, water table, and window and door openings. The spandrels, corner piers and parapet were actually covered with one-inch-thick Portland Cement Stucco applied directly to the concrete block. Over the front entry was planned, but not erected, a transom covered by a grille and surmounted by a cartouche that featured a turtle, presumably a reference to Cobbs Creek. The plans show the main floor as consisting of an entry vestibule, a main reading room bisected by a centrally located circulation desk into two flanking areas, and a section in a rear ell designated as the Children's Reading Room. At the basement level the drawings show a hall, store room, magazine room, staff retiring room, women's and men's toilets, chair storage, class room, boiler room, coal storage, janitor's room, and an entry from the exterior.⁷ The library retains this basic configuration.

6. Alterations and additions: The library was renovated in 1957 as part of a larger campaign to upgrade all of the branch libraries in the city. At that time new heating, air conditioning, and electrical systems were added, and the rest rooms were renovated. Modern lighting fixtures and new furniture were also installed. The library was again updated in 1997, as were all the branches, to include the installation of a computer network.

B. Historical Context:

The Carnegie Funded Free Library of Philadelphia Building Campaign

On 3 January 1903, Carnegie's secretary James Bertram responded to the Free Library of Philadelphia's request for a grant to finance the construction of libraries with the promise of \$1.5 million for a planned thirty branch libraries. Despite the fact that Philadelphia figures quite prominently on the timeline of American Library history, it had no purpose-built public libraries prior to the Carnegie endowment. Philadelphia *did* have the nation's first private subscription library, known as the Library Company, founded in 1731. Numerous other private libraries were created as well, such as the Mercantile Library, Ridgeway Library, and the library at the University of Pennsylvania. And it was in Philadelphia that the American Library Association was formed in 1876. The establishment of the Free Library in 1891 placed Philadelphia among

⁷ Edmund Beaman Gilchrist Collection, Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania, Gilchrist, Box 8 (007.224.260), Folder #231, Free Library of Philadelphia, Cobbs Creek, "General Conditions of the Contract," and a set of full size drawings.

the first American cities to institute a non-subscription public library system for the benefit of all of Philadelphia's citizens. As Library Board president J.G. Rosengarten stated in 1903, "Proprietary libraries have grown into valuable adjuncts to our other education institutions. None of them, however, serves the public as does the Free Library, providing good reading for our school children, for our industrious adult population, and for the city's useful employees, firemen, and telegraph operators."⁸ As Rosengarten's comment indicates, the library system was an important component of the city's public education.

However, prior to the Carnegie funding, the city's fourteen branch libraries, each started by interested local communities, were dependent upon old mansions, storefronts, or back rooms of commercial buildings and civic institutions for library space. As Rosengarten points out, "The [Carnegie] gift gave welcome relief from the expense of the rented rooms occupied by the branches, and from much of the risk to which the collections were subjected in these temporary quarters."⁹ Likewise, prior to the completion of its permanent home in 1927, the Central Branch of the Free Library was housed within three different preexisting buildings, including City Hall, an abandoned concert hall on Chestnut Street, and a building at the northeast corner of 13th and Locust streets. Carnegie's \$1.5 million grant would change all that. Beginning in 1905, the endowment was used for the design and construction of twenty-five branch libraries throughout the city (three of which are no longer extant). They were built between 1905 and 1930, with the bulk of them constructed by 1917, and designed by a wide range of Philadelphia architects.

Philadelphia was just one of many cities to receive a library grant. Andrew Carnegie provided forty million dollars for the construction of over 1,600 libraries throughout the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and about 400 more abroad). Carnegie was motivated by both his own immigrant experience and by his social/political beliefs. Despite his poor, working-class upbringing, he made a fortune through the production of steel. Believing that the wealthy were obligated to give back to society, Carnegie set out to spend during his lifetime the entire 400 million dollars that he received through the sale of Carnegie Steel Company. Carnegie also believed that given a good work ethic and the proper tools, anyone could be successful. He was self-taught and credited his success to his access to one gentleman's private library. Carnegie came to believe in the power of libraries to create an egalitarian society that favored hard work over social privilege. Hence libraries, as a key to learning and socialization, became a focus of his charitable donations.

While Carnegie's motivations were in large part paternalistic, the impact of his library campaign is far greater than merely providing the working class with access to books. The vast resources that he applied to this area lead to great advances in library science as well as to the development of the American Library as a building type. Carnegie applied the corporate business models that had made him successful as an industrialist to the development and production of libraries. He insured that local municipalities had a stake in their libraries by insisting that they supply the building site and the books, as well as ten percent of the total construction cost annually for maintenance. By so doing, Carnegie took libraries from the arena of private philanthropy to that of civic responsibility. Any town that was willing to meet those terms was basically able to

⁸ Theodore Wesley Koch, *A Book of Carnegie Libraries* (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1917), 85.

⁹ Ibid.

receive grant funding. The process began via a letter of application submitted to Andrew Carnegie's personal secretary and the individual charged with management of the library grants, James Bertram. In 1903, the city of Philadelphia did just that.

Unlike its rival New York City, Philadelphia's planning group, the Carnegie Fund Committee, placed librarians and not architects at the forefront of the planning process. This is likely the primary reason for the relative standardization of Philadelphia's branch libraries, particularly with regard to layout. This important decision on the part of the Library Board was in keeping with the sentiments endorsed by the Carnegie Corporation. James Bertram was generally distrustful of architects as library planners, believing that they tended to make libraries too expensive by adding unusable space and superfluous detail merely for affect. He preferred the advice of librarians who better understood how libraries needed to function. Both the Philadelphia Library Board and Carnegie Fund Committee included well-placed librarians, the former being Pennsylvania State Librarian and American Library Association representative Thomas L. Montgomery, and the latter, librarian for the Free Library, John Thomson. President of the Board of Education Henry R. Edmunds was also on the Committee, an indication of the significance of the libraries to public education in Philadelphia. Prominent local businessmen and attorneys filled the other positions. As the Committee minutes indicate, the Librarian and Assistant Librarian were left to work out the details with the architects, and generally had the last say when it came to finalizing the plans.¹⁰ (For more information about the Carnegie Library construction program and the Free Library of Philadelphia's own library building campaign see, Free Library of Philadelphia, Central Branch, HABS No. PA-6749, Historical Context section.)

The Cobbs Creek Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia

The idea of creating a branch library at Cobbs Creek was first proposed by local City Council representative George O'Connell in November 1920 in the form of a letter to the Free Library of Philadelphia. In 1921, a committee of locals groups and churches from West Philadelphia was formed to further promote the idea. Interestingly enough, a letter was sent from J. McCracken, Jr., Supervising Principal of the Samuel D. Huey Public School, 52nd and Pine streets stating that "a number of principals of schools in this neighborhood are interested in having a branch of the Philadelphia Free Library established in this locality" and asking for advice on how to go about it.¹¹ The interest of school administrators speaks to the valuable role that libraries played, particularly in that era, in public education. Although depleting resources initially posed problems for the viability of a library at Cobbs Creek, the committee's persistence would eventually be rewarded.

The reluctance of city and the Carnegie Fund Committee in approving the construction of the Cobbs Creek Branch was due to the unanticipated lack of available funding. The Carnegie grant

¹⁰ Free Library of Philadelphia, Board of Trustees, Minutes, 1 July 1904. "On motion resolved, that the matter of procuring plans and securing bids be referred to the Carnegie Fund Committee with power." And also, Carnegie Fund Committee Minutes, 17 May 1912. An entry from this meeting (one of many) illustrates that practices: "Mr. Richards [architect] be instructed to prepare plans for the proposed new Paschalville Branch and that the President be authorized to approve plans for such Branch when same were agreed upon by himself, the Librarian, Asst. Librarian and the architect."

¹¹ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, 6 March, 1923.

that was issued in 1905 had estimated the cost of each of the planned thirty branches at \$50,000 per structure. However, inflationary costs by the late nineteen-teens, brought on by America's entry into World War I, had resulted in substantial cost overruns. A hiatus in the construction of the remaining branch libraries actually had to be called after the construction of the Kingsessing and Logan branches was completed in 1918, due to labor and material shortages. The Carnegie Corporation grew anxious as the city sought to find ways to stretch the remaining grant funds to meet their obligations. In a letter from John Ashhurst to James Bertram it was written, "Dear sir: I write to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of October 9, stating that nearly twenty years ago Mr. Carnegie provided an opportunity for Philadelphia to secure thirty branch library buildings as a cost of \$1,500,000, adding that you have had no communication on the subject for three years and are asking in view of the great lapse of time if the program is finished, so that nay remaining balance may be written off your books."¹² In the final analysis, the city and the community provided for one-half of the cost for construction; the local community gave \$30,000 with \$34,266.91 in funding provided by the Carnegie Fund Committee. In order to help fund its portion of the construction cost of the Cobbs Creek Branch, the city council passed an ordinance allowing the sale of another city lot, and its local representative George Connell told the Librarian that he "promised to use his influence to provide whatever balance was needed after this sale to secure building."¹³

In January 1924 it was reported that the mayor had signed an ordinance transferring the property upon which the Cobbs Creek Branch would be built from the Department of Public Works of City Property to the Board of Trustees of the Free Library of Philadelphia. By April, the Librarian for the Free Library submitted to the Carnegie Fund Committee for its approval perspective drawings and blueprints of the proposed library, along with cost estimates. The Librarian also reported that a resident of the area, Mr. Vincent Stone, had expressed his willingness to fund-raise among the various businessmen's associations in the neighborhood for the purchase of books for the library.¹⁴

By July the architect had made recommended adjustments to the building specifications and an agreement, along with a list of potential contractors, had been approved. In addition, the city council had approved a \$30,000 appropriation. In August, low bidder William R. Dougherty was selected despite the fact that the bid was in excess of available funds. Dougherty was asked to appear before the committee "in order to ascertain whether it might not be possible for him to reduce his bid within the amount specified." He met with the committee and later with the architect. As a result, in September architect Gilchrist submitted to the committee a revised set of plans and specifications according to which the builder reduced his original cost estimate of \$57,700 to \$50,356.¹⁵ Groundbreaking finally occurred on 27 October 1924.

By April, the superintendent of building for the city reported the condition of the building at that time as follows:

¹² Letter from J. Ashhurst to J. Bertram, dated 6 October 1922, Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, 5 January 1923.

¹³ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, 5 October 1923.

¹⁴ Ibid, 4 January, and 4 April 1924.

¹⁵ Ibid, 11 July, 9 August, and 3 October 1924.

Roofing is complete; interior plastering is finished; the building is ready for shelving and floor covering; grading is to be done, as reported previously. The window sills of the class room which were [to be of] plaster should be changed to wood. An additional cost of \$50 will be involved for this change, but I feel it would be a good investment, because we will have difficulty in keeping the plastered sills in condition. The architect has requested that an additional cost of \$45 be approved for changes of ornamental plastering which he feels should be done for the improvement of the design. The shelf at [the] base of [the] book cases originally specified poplar, and the stair treads and risers of the same wood will be changed to yellow pine by the contractor at no additional cost. The use of poplar in these locations would be very unsatisfactory. Estimates for shelving are being taken, and designs and estimates for lighting fixtures are being prepared.”¹⁶

In addition, reference is made in the minutes of April 1925 to a permanent book fund, “which Dr. Albert S. Smith of 5911 Cobbs Creek Parkway, is endeavoring to collect from the residents of that neighborhood, the income of this fund to be used for the purchase of reference books for the Cobbs Creek Branch.”¹⁷

The opening was held on 30 December 1925 and presided over by Dr. Cyrus Adler, President of the Board of Trustees of the Free Library; Librarian of the Free Library, John Ashurst, and the architect, Edmund Gilchrist. The highlights of the event included the ceremonious turning over of the keys by Gilchrist to Ashurst, and the presentation by Dr. Albert B. Smith, President of the local Carnegie Committee Free Library Association, to Adler of a check for \$2,500 as the association’s first payment of the pledge of \$10,000 for books and upkeep.¹⁸ According to local legend, it was a race to the finish to open the library on schedule. On the day of the opening, interior detail elements were still being painted and the lights hung, and there were still wood shavings on the floor from the construction.¹⁹

At the time that the library was built, the Cobbs Creek neighborhood was described as divided into two sections, Angora and Sherwood. Angora lies to the west of 58th Street and extends to Cobbs Creek, which forms the dividing line between Philadelphia and Delaware County, and to the north and south of Baltimore Avenue. Angora was the name of the village that originally formed here around a cotton mill. The mill was removed in 1912 to make way for the many row-houses that now occupy the area. To the east of 58th Street and also flanking Baltimore Avenue is Sherwood. It was named for the forest that once consumed the area. At one time, the land on which the library now sits was part of the Hoffman farm.²⁰ The neighborhood in 1925, when the library was under construction, was described as residential with a number of corner stores. The population was largely Jewish, in the middle to upper income brackets. The neighborhood today is largely African American.

¹⁶ Report signed H.C. Trout, Superintendent of Buildings, 2 April 1925, Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, 3 April 1925, 153.

¹⁷ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minutes, 3 April 1925.

¹⁸ “New Library Branch Opens,” *Public Ledger*, 31 December 1925.

¹⁹ “The Free Library of Philadelphia, Cobbs Creek Branch,” (author and date unknown) history files on site at the library.

²⁰ The old farm house was still standing at the time this account was written (date unknown) at the corner of 61st street and Cobbs Creek Parkway. The last member of the family died in 1953 and the estate was left to a bible society. Ibid.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Cobbs Creek Branch varies considerably from the other branches of the Free Library of Philadelphia in its architectural styling and building materials. Unlike the brick constructed, Beaux Arts design of the others, it is executed in a stripped-down classicism almost suggestive of streamlined Moderne using structural steel, cinderblock and concrete. The architect, Edmund Gilchrist, had actually planned for more classically inspired detailing, including pilasters and an elaborate frontispiece with a cartouche featuring the Cobbs Creek turtle and an elaborate grille. Likewise, Gilchrist had hoped to use Indiana limestone for such details. However, cost cutting measures required the elimination of unnecessary ornamental elements. The result is a bare-bones classicism that, combined with the more high-tech building materials, gives the library overall a more Moderne appearance. The front includes a shallow "pavilion" front, as was used in the other Carnegie Branches. Its modern look has been accentuated in more recent years by additional applications of stucco, obscuring elements such as the walls below the water table that were originally scored to look like ashlar stone. The banding of the windows, separated by plain pilasters, also adds to the modern appearance, as does the more recent application of bright yellow paint to its exterior, and a painted mural around its base.

2. Condition of fabric: The library appears to be well maintained and in good condition, despite the fact that numerous applications of stucco and paint have obscured detail elements.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building consists of a rectangular main block measuring 80'-8" x 34'-6" with a rear ell to form a T-shaped configuration. It is a high, single-story structure, nine-bays across, and sits on a raised basement.

2. Foundations: The foundations are of stone.

3. Walls: The walls are of cinder-block with an application of cement stucco. The windows appear between unornamented pilasters which also serve to create plain spandrels in the space beneath the windows and above the water-table. The water table area is brightly painted with a mural featuring people, most of who are reaching out to each other, to form a parade of sorts around the base of the structure.

4. Structural systems, framing: The structural system is of steel and reinforced with cinder block.

5. Porches, stoops: A wide set of stairs flanked by low walls creates a front stoop.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The main doorway is located to the center of the front façade and is part of a shallow pavilion flanked by a plain molded surround. There are double wood doors with a large arrangement of lights above to include a central portion of eight-lights flanked by sidelights over which has been placed a metal security grill. There is a secondary entry into the basement located to the eastern side of the main block.

b. Windows and shutters: The typical window is fixed and is of metal construction to include twelve lights with the center two forming operable hopper windows. The windows are framed by plain pilasters to both sides, with a cornice above, and a sill with a plain spandrel below. Casement windows are also located at the basement level. All the windows are covered by security grills.

7. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The roof appears flat (inaccessible).

b. Cornice, eaves: A simple entablature forms a parapet along the upper edge of the roof line. It appears to be of terra cotta to resemble ashlar stone. It is pierced by the pilasters located between the windows, although the lengthy pilaster sections below are painted and are of stucco over cinderblock construction.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The library has an open plan consisting of a main reading room bisected by a circulation desk located at the front entry, which opens into a smaller reading room in the rear ell. The circulation desk is of light-colored wood in a simple modern design with rounded corners, and bold lettering announcing "CIRCULATION DESK" and "CHECK IN." An area to the front of the eastern side is partitioned to create work space for the library staff. The western side of the main reading room is currently being used as the Children's Section, and the reference and computer area is in the rear ell. Also in the rear section, where it meets with the main block, is located a doorway into the stair hall. At the landing located between the two runs of the stair is a doorway to the exterior, which provides direct access to the basement meeting room and other facilities for the staff and for the maintenance of the building.

2. Stairways: A stairway is located at the crux of the main reading room and the rear ell, within the latter section.

3. Flooring: The wood flooring has been covered with a combination of carpet and linoleum tile with a checkerboard pattern of tiles surrounding the circulation desk; the flooring is rounded at the corners to mimic the lines of the desk.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceiling are of plaster, and there is shallow molding on the ceiling to create a coffered effect. The walls are lined with built-in shelving.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Simple wood casing is used to surround the doorways. A large cased opening appears between the main reading room and the rear ell section.

b. Windows: The windows, like the doors, are surrounded by plain wood casing.

6. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating: The ducts for the heating and air conditioning are hidden within the high plinth upon which the built-in bookcases rest, with alternating wood panels and registers.

b. Lighting: Fluorescent lighting fixtures hang from the ceiling.

c. Plumbing: Kitchen and restroom facilities are located in the basement.

D. Site: The Cobbs Creek Library sits in a small park like environment on its own wedge-shaped parcel of land formed by the intersection of Cobbs Creek Parkway, Baltimore Avenue, 58th and 59th streets. As appears in the photograph taken upon the completion of the library in 1925 and is still extant today, a broad concrete walkway leads down the center of the green space to the front steps of the library, with park benches flank it. Similar but narrower walks are located around the perimeter of the site and also perpendicular to the central walk, to either side of the front entry. There is open green space to the rear as well. Baltimore Avenue forms a main thoroughfare through the city of Philadelphia and continues out to the suburban regions. Along it is found a mix of commercial and residential development. Beyond the Avenue, the area consists mostly of residential development, largely in the form of row-housing.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early views:

Free Library of Philadelphia, *Annual Report of the Library Board, 1907*, William H. Rau, photographs.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary records: The records of the Free Library of Philadelphia are located at the Central Library on Vine Street. The *Annual Reports* are located in the Municipal Reference Division, Cities P53-1154; and the Carnegie Fund Committee Minute Books are located in the Director's Vault (access by special permission).

Free Library of Philadelphia, *Annual Report of the Library Board, 1923-1925*.

Ibid. Carnegie Fund Committee, *Minutes, 1923-1925*.

Gilchrist, Edmund Beaman, Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania, Gilchrist, Box 8 (007.224.260), Folder #231, Free Library of Philadelphia, Cobbs Creek, "General Conditions of the Contract," and a set of full size drawings.

2. Secondary records:

Bobinski, George S. *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1969.

"Celebrate 100 Years of Making a Difference," available at the Holmes Branch Library. Free Library of Philadelphia, *Annual Report of the Library Board, 1907*, William H. Rau, photographs.

Dierickx, Mary B. *The Architecture of Literacy; The Carnegie Libraries of New York City*. New York City: The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Art and Science & NYC Department of General Services, September 1996.

Koch, Theodore Wesley. *A Book of Carnegie Libraries*. New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1917.

Moss, Roger and Sandra Tatman, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects*, Boston: G.K. Hall & company, 1985.

Van Slyck, Abigail. *Free to All; Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the Cobbs Creek Branch Library was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, Richard O'Connor, Chief during summer 2007 as part of a larger initiative to record the Carnegie Funded branch libraries of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The project is sponsored by HABS in cooperation with the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, John A. Gallery, director; and the Free Library of Philadelphia, William J. Fleming, Administrative Services Director, and made possible through a Congressional appropriation for recording in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The historical reports were prepared by Lisa P. Davidson and Catherine C. Lavoie. Large-format photography was undertaken for HABS by Joseph Elliott. Measured drawings were prepared of the Thomas Holme Branch as the typical branch library during the summer 2008. The drawings team was led by Robert Arzola, working with Jason McNatt, Paul Davidson, and Ann Kidd, architectural technicians.